

interconnections

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Comprehensive Conservation Update

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“All of life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied to a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.” Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1969)

“A thing is right only when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the community; and the community includes the soil, water, fauna and flora, as well as the people.” Aldo Leopold (1887-1948) *A Sand County Almanac*

interconnections

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks comprehensive conservation update

We hope this publication serves as an introduction to the development and implementation of Montana's Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy. The CFWCS is a cooperative effort coordinated by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to identify all of Montana's fish and wildlife, and their related habitats. The Strategy enables the state to continue receiving experimental State Wildlife Grant funds now, and hopefully will lead to secure long-term funds to implement future conservation efforts.

For more information

Visit fwp.mt.gov. Click on **Wild Things** and then **State Wildlife Grants**. You will be directed to information on funding and the Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CFWCS) with its executive summary and the Action Plan. Please call 406-444-3318 or e-mail jpelej@mt.gov with questions.

Produced in-house by
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Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks comprehensive conservation update

BROADENING THE FOCUS:

Comprehensive conservation

Fish and wildlife management in Montana emerged in the late 1800s out of concern for diminished fish and wildlife populations due to over hunting, fishing, and trapping and an increasing number of people living off the land.

This led to the passage of protective legislation in 1864. By 1901, a fish and wildlife agency was established with revenue sources to support conservation functions. In 1941, a science-based wildlife restoration program was born.

The results are today's healthy populations of more than 80 hunted and fished species and a continuing tradition of successful fish and game management in the state.

Now, after over 60 years of successfully restoring hunted and fished species, interest in conserving fish and wildlife populations of a different sort is growing. There are more than 500 species in Montana that have received scant attention to keep them from declining, or even to evaluate how populations are doing.

The completion of Montana's Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CFWCS), an extensive analysis of more than 600 species of birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians, and muskies, along with the places they live, is an important first step to give today's species in need of conservation some necessary attention.

The next steps are to develop efficient ways to conserve species in need using limited federal funds recently put into place, continue working toward additional

long-term funding sources, and incorporate traditional game management efforts with new needs.

ONE LANDSCAPE, MANY SPECIES

The comprehensive conservation idea is based on two simple, well-known facts that grew out of more than half a century of sport fish and game management:

- Living things affect other living things in shared habitats; and
- No state, no matter how well intended, has the funding to conserve all species individually, place by place, year by year.

Knowing this, Montana's strategy sets out to identify critical habitats for both species in need and those that are doing well. With

this kind of broad conservation focus, all species that share particular landscapes will benefit from conservation actions.

For example, the strategy identifies the Rocky Mountain Front foothills as a geographic conservation focus area that har-



bors 19 species of greatest conservation need, including the long-billed curlew and threatened grizzly bear. Should Montanans consider

supporting a modest conservation investment like controlling invasive plants, that investment would immediately benefit all 19 species in need of conservation as well as the elk, moose, and more than 300 other native wildlife species that also inhabit the Rocky Mountain Front foothills. Those of us who value the Rocky Mountain Front or other natural areas in the state will benefit from comprehensive conservation, too. ■



Greater sage grouse



Inside the Strategy:

Montana is divided into four ecotypes, each with unique conservation needs

Intermountain Grassland. Montane Forest. Plains Grassland and Forest. Shrub Grassland. Within these ecotypes, focus areas have been identified as geographic starting points for FWP and its partners to direct combined efforts to conserve Montana's community types and species in greatest need of conservation.

Montana's successful tradition of wildlife management has largely come from hunting and fishing license dollars and taxes on equipment. This unique federal and state funding arrangement has afforded Montana great opportunities to work on sport fish and game species.

State Wildlife Grants are a new temporary source of federal funds for species in conservation need. Montana and other states can now focus on the hundreds of species that fall in the conservation gap between game species and those that are threatened or endangered.

With the help of this funding, Montana researchers have already found fish in "fishless" prairie streams, discovered a new mammal in the state, and created a way to protect grizzly bears and the local community living on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation.

There is little doubt that the science of fish and wildlife management has evolved beyond the first principles set down in Montana in the early days of conservation or as represented by the father of wildlife conservation, Aldo Leopold, in his 1930 ground-breaking book *Game Management*.

Evidence of this evolution is embodied in Montana's Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy, the beginning of a state action plan that will help identify and prevent problems before they threaten fish, wildlife, and our own quality of life.



**Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks**

FWP sees this as an opportunity for all Montanans to come together as we did 60 years ago to invest in a state fish and wildlife action plan. It is an investment in tradition and quality of life. Montana's action plan for comprehensive fish and wildlife conservation will help us fulfill our responsibility to conserve fish, wildlife, and natural areas for future generations.

We are committed to keeping you informed and involved as this evolution in conservation progresses.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "M. Jeff Hagener".

M. Jeff Hagener
Director, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks



Pronghorn

Paddlefish

Nelson's sharp-tailed sparrow



Montana's eastern grasslands constitute about 50 percent of the state. The landscape is typically high, rolling land with some scattered hills and wide river valleys including the Yellowstone and Missouri rivers, which represent the most diverse communities of fish in Montana. The plains are characterized by a limited number of dominant grasses and xeric shrubs. This ecotype generally receives less than 15 inches of rain a year and endures days of high winds in the blistering heat of summer and the blizzards and cold of winter. Woody draws, considered "ribbons of life," dot the landscape and render protection as an oasis for wildlife. In the southeast and north are the unique badlands or "breaks" sculpted by wind and water. The prairie forests that occur as isolated mountain chains are somewhat higher in elevation than the surrounding plains grassland, creating precipitation conditions favoring the establishment of a closed canopy forest. The Great Plains ponderosa pine is the sole conifer forming the plains forests in combination with various hardwoods. These forests are a unique part of the plains landscape.

Ecotype: Plains grassland and forest

Conserving fish, wildlife and Montana's outdoor traditions

Montana's hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing opportunities are reasons why people call Montana home, or return time and time again to visit the state's natural places. They form the basis of many family traditions. It is a priority in Montana to make sure these traditions live on.

The security of these outdoor traditions lies in continuing to make good conservation decisions. It began with traditional management practices of the early 1900s, and it continues today thanks to hunters and anglers who support fish and game programs through the purchase of hunting and fishing licenses and related gear.

Future efforts to keep valued outdoor traditions alive will need to include a broadening of focus to include species of greatest conservation need, aiming to prevent or reverse population declines before they have a detrimental effect on all species. These efforts, however, will not succeed by depending exclusively on traditional funding sources and conservation actions.

Most people who enjoy the state understand that Montana's outdoor traditions and activities provide benefits that make life here enjoyable and rewarding. They

also understand that it takes cooperation and an investment in conservation to keep these traditions alive. The challenge is to create advocates for conservation of outdoor landscapes, waterways, fish and wildlife populations, and habitats who are willing to offer the kind of support that more than three generations of hunters and anglers have provided.

Comprehensive conservation, in part, seeks the participation and investment of all Montanans to conserve fish, wildlife and vital natural areas to ensure that future generations can enjoy the same outdoor experiences that are enjoyed today. ■

Did you know?



Wildlife watching is the single most popular outdoors activity among Montana visitors? In 2001 an estimated 9.5 million travelers visited the state, with 36 percent of them participating in wildlife watching.

—Montana Challenge, Cindy S. Swanson

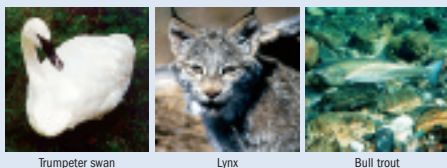
60

Montana species in greatest need of conservation

Montana's CFWCS has four main components based on broad geographical areas, defined fish and wildlife communities, species in greatest conservation need, and species that need to be inventoried. The assessment identifies 60 species in greatest conservation need:

- 1 invertebrate:** *the western pearlshell mussel*
- 3 amphibians:** *the boreal toad, Coeur d'Alene salamander, northern leopard frog*
- 5 reptiles:** *the milk snake, smooth green snake, snapping turtle, spiny softshell turtle, and western hognose snake*
- 15 mammals:** *including the lynx, hoary marmot, and spotted bat*
- 17 fish:** *including the Yellowstone cutthroat trout and endangered pallid sturgeon*
- 19 birds:** *including the burrowing owl and long-billed curlew*

Of the 60 species, 22 are covered under existing conservation plans and 11 are listed as threatened or endangered species. The strategy emphasizes the need to conserve these species proactively to keep them from becoming more rare and more expensive to protect, to avoid future threatened or endangered species listings, and to leave wildlife management decisions in the hands of Montanans.

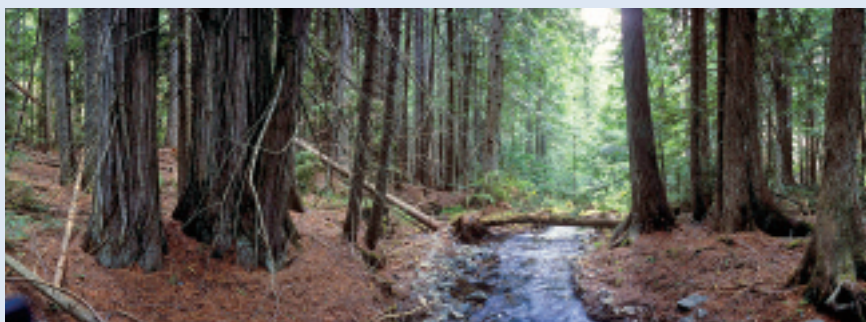


Trumpeter swan

Lynx

Bull trout

The montane forest ecotype includes the mountains of Montana that have been formed by tectonic uplift and glacial erosion. These high-elevation areas occur along the western third of the state and encompass mountains with increasing elevations ranging from the north where the Kootenai River flows into Idaho (1,800 feet) southward to the snow-capped peaks in the Beartooth Range (12,800 feet) adjacent to Yellowstone National Park. Vast coniferous forest complexes of larch, fir, hemlock, pine, and spruce trees characterize these areas that protect the headwater mountain streams of Montana's rivers. Much of this ecosystem is in public ownership through the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). Collaboration with the USFS will be critical to the conservation of this ecotype.



Ecotype: Montane forest

Common questions and concerns

Q *Will comprehensive conservation take away from the management of sport fish and animals?*

A No. Maintaining Montana's high standard for fish and wildlife management is a top priority in Montana. Our sport fishing and hunting opportunities are a matter of state and national pride, and they contribute more than \$1 billion annually to the Montana economy and untold billions in related recreation activities that are so important to many of our family traditions. Leveraging federal funds, currently in the form of federal State Wildlife Grants, will allow state fish and wildlife agencies to begin conserving species in greatest need without

exclusively tapping into traditional funding sources.

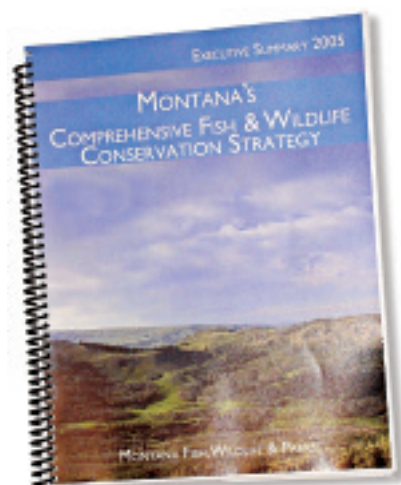
Q *Will the CFWCS draw attention to imperiled species so they can be listed as threatened or endangered?*

A No. The strategy identifies Montana's critical fish and wildlife habitats and the animals that need special attention. The goal is to keep species from becoming threatened or endangered and to keep fish and wildlife management decisions in the hands of Montana citizens.

Q *How will the CFWCS affect FWP's fish and wildlife biologists?*

A Montana's biologists are as important as ever. FWP will not reduce its emphasis on responsibilities associated with Montana's traditional sport fish and game management. With the help of SWG funding, however, FWP will continue to explore ways to meet the needs of species in the greatest need of conservation. As time and staffing allow, and in the course of normal data collection activities such as shocking fish and winter deer counts, biologists

will be asked to be more attentive to species not typically inventoried or monitored. In some instances, there will be immediate opportunities for those interested to expand their research and data collection efforts. FWP has already embarked on a number of demonstration projects using SWG dollars, including a prairie fish survey, studies on native sauger genetics and sauger movements in the Yellowstone, common loon ecology studies, and inventories of small mammals and reptiles in and near sagebrush habitats. These and other similar projects represent the first time many species and habitats have been examined, studied, or surveyed by professionally trained fish and wildlife biologists. ■

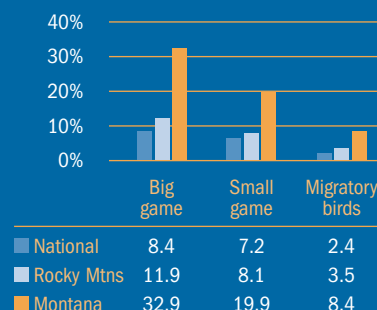


Did you know?

More Montanans hunt per capita than residents of any other state.



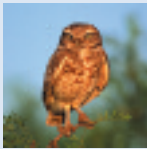
Percent of population who hunt



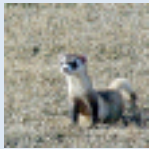
Source: Montana Challenge, 2001



Milk snake



Burrowing owl



Black-footed ferret



The shrub grassland ecotype occurs in widely separated segments across most of the eastern half of the state in high-elevation alleys and along non-forested slopes. The junipers and sagebrushes that characterize these generally dry slopes only make up 8 percent of Montana's land. They are interspersed with low cover grasslands and offer a unique transitional area habitat that supports many of Montana's species of greatest conservation need. Over half of this limited ecotype is privately owned. These benches have traditionally provided grazing lands but in recent years have become prized for residential development because they provide accessible sites with sweeping views. Working with landowners will be critical for the conservation of this ecotype.

Ecotype: Shrub grassland

A national effort and affordable conservation partnership

Montana's comprehensive conservation strategy is one of 56 submitted by each state and territory in the nation. The strategies outline state-specific conservation needs developed by scientists, sportspeople, businesses, conservationists, and other members of the community working together. They line states up to achieve local conservation goals while also working with federal organizations to reverse a national trend of decreasing wildlife populations and increasing threatened or endangered species.

"We are making a significant step in establishing a new cooperative conservation legacy in America," said Gale Norton, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Interior, at a recent press conference recognizing the significance of all states submitting strategies to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

This effort brings Montana and other states a step closer to securing long-term federal funding needed to conserve and manage hundreds of species that have historically fallen into the funding gap between the state's major game animals and those that are threatened or endangered. It also opens the doors for state agencies to work with conservation organizations and other interested parties to combine resources

to achieve common conservation goals. ■

"A collaborative approach to conservation will ensure future generations of Montanans a diverse landscape rich in fish and wildlife, as well as the preservation of our outdoor traditions."

—Governor Brian Schweitzer



For examples of cooperative conservation at work, visit:

www.cooperativeconservationamerica.org

Or Teaming with Wildlife:

www.teaming.com

THE CHALLENGE

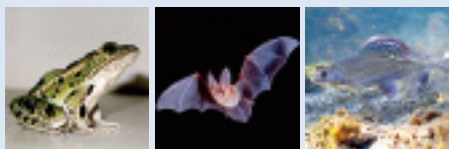
Species and habitats face a variety of conservation concerns



GARY LEPPART

Part of Montana's CFWCS identified conservation concerns specific to various community types, and proposed strategies to face these challenges. Some of these concerns include:

- Habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation as a result of human infrastructure development
- Conversion of native prairie and wetlands to agricultural cropland and subdivisions
- Introduction and invasion of non-native, exotic plant, fish, and animal species
- Streamside residential development
- Petroleum exploration and development impacts
- Stream diversions and dewatering for irrigation practices
- Unsustainable range or forest management practices
- Impacts from recreational use
- Insufficient scientific data of habitats and species



Northern leopard frog

Townsend's big-eared bat

Arctic grayling

The intermountain grasslands ecotype represents the broad sweeping valleys of western Montana cradled by the peaks of the Rocky Mountains. The mosaic of mostly privately owned land extends from the Flathead River Valley in the north to the Centennial Valley in the south to the Little Belt foothills in the east. These valleys, formed mainly by glaciers, represent some of Montana's most diverse habitat. They are often bisected by meandering river corridors that sustain core riparian and wetland areas, and are sometimes dotted by glacial lakes. This ecosystem harbors more diverse community types and wildlife species than any other in Montana. The intermountain grasslands ecotype also contains some of the greatest concentrations of human population in Montana including the cities of Kalispell, Missoula, Helena, and Bozeman and their surrounding areas. Addressing the challenges that accompany this interface between human settlement and fish, wildlife and their habitats is critical to the conservation of this ecotype.



Ecotype: Intermountain/foothill grassland

Funding comprehensive conservation

With the completion of Montana's Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy, the state remains eligible for future State Wildlife Grant allocations.

State Wildlife Grants (SWG), the pilot federal funding source created by Congress in 2001, is currently the nation's core program to fund fish and wildlife programs for species in greatest need of conservation – those experiencing population declines, at risk for decline or already listed as threatened or endangered.

Every state was required to develop comprehensive conservation strategies to ensure efficient and effective use of SWG funds before allocating future dollars.

The money, which must be matched dollar-for-dollar with nonfederal funds, is intended to enable state fish and wildlife agencies to broaden their focus to include species of greatest conservation need, to better prevent or reverse population declines without exclusively tapping into traditional funding sources.

All states hope the work leads to a long-term commitment of federal funds to the state's conservation resource pool.

Since 2001, Montana has received over \$5 million in SWG funds for fish and wildlife conservation programs. These funds have supported projects like prairie stream surveys; native Arctic grayling and cutthroat trout restoration; loon research, wolf and grizzly bear management planning; and

inventories of small mammals and reptiles.

FWP hopes to integrate future funds to broaden existing programs and collaborate resources with partner groups to better achieve priority conservation objectives.



Eye the Eagle!

Donations to the Nongame Wildlife Checkoff on your Montana tax form provide vital match for SWG project funds, so your money goes twice as far!

A history of conservation funding

1937 Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act/Pittman-Robertson Act became law. It earmarked excise taxes on sporting arms and ammunition for land acquisition, development, and research. The act also prohibited the diversion of hunting license revenue to projects unassociated with hunted species. Since its passage, Montana has received over \$125 million through the 2004 fiscal year.

1950 Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act/Dingell-Johnson Act was passed, modeling the Pittman-Robertson Act, only earmarking excise taxes on fishing equipment. Through fiscal year 2004, Montana has received over \$100 million.

1965 Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) was established to "provide a diversity of outdoor recreation resources which would allow individual active participation in a variety of outdoor pastimes." Responsibility for the program was eventually transferred to the National Park Service in 1981.

1980 Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act/Non-Game Act/Forsythe-Chafee Act was passed by the U.S. Congress to fund conservation projects for non-game fish and wildlife that typically received little assistance. Financed by general revenue, it was approved at a \$5 million level and would be appropriated annually by Congress. However, no funds were ever appropriated.

1994 Teaming With Wildlife Initiative was launched to secure money for a comprehensive wildlife management program. The movement attracted over 3,000 supporting organizations.

1997 Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA) was initially introduced by Teaming With Wildlife. It sought to expand a federal tax on outdoor equipment, including camping, bird watching/feeding, and photography. At the time no states were prepared to fully embrace it.

2000 CARA was reduced and passed in a compromise. Lawmakers, conservation groups, all state governors, and President Clinton supported CARA in its full amount. Over the concern of some legislators, the 15-year, \$45 billion package was reduced to a 6-year, \$12 billion discretionary fund. The president signed this new version of the bill at the end of his term.

2001 State Wildlife Grants, emerging out of CARA, are meant to enable states to broaden their conservation focus to include all species. SWG funds currently support conservation projects for species in greatest need of conservation, to keep these species for which biological data is lacking, and whose populations are in decline, off the federal threatened or endangered species lists.

Setting comprehensive conservation into motion

Now that Montana's Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CFWCS) has been submitted for federal approval, it is time to reconvene the collaborating groups that helped develop it so it can be taken to the next level—implementation of a fish and wildlife action plan.

Between now and June 2006, FWP will request input from past partners and potential new partners to develop a Comprehensive Conservation Action Plan that will set the CFWCS into motion.

Since comprehensive conservation is a statewide issue, FWP wants to make sure perspectives from all corners of the state are considered to make the Action Plan as functional, thorough, and effective as possible. We hope we can rely on your support and involvement.

The Comprehensive Conservation Action Plan will be developed in a series of steps.

Step 1 early January

Reconvene the advisory committee, a core group of agencies and organizations previously involved in CFWCS development, to determine and finalize selection criteria that will be used to identify the most practical and urgent conservation needs listed in the CFWCS. All the conservation needs identified in the CFWCS are important, but it is necessary to identify a subset of priorities where efforts should be directed over the next five years.

Step 2 late January

Apply selection criteria to conservation needs identified in the CFWCS to develop a list of conservation priorities to focus on first. Examples of selection criteria could be: 1) Species that are most likely to be listed as threatened or endangered in the near future; 2) Habitats that are in greatest decline and are essential to the greatest number of species in need of conservation

Step 3 March

Hold meetings in each region of the state to discuss the draft list of conservation priorities and strategies with other agen-

cies, conservation organizations, special interest groups, and FWP staff. This is a chance for new partners to get involved in the process and for past partners to continue an active role in comprehensive conservation. For FWP it's a chance to discuss how conservation priorities fit into existing projects.

Step 4 April

Develop working partnerships by determining how resources can be paired to better achieve goals. Agencies, organizations, and other interested parties will develop and provide information about 1) the conservation priorities they are interested in implementing, 2) what resources they can dedicate, and 3) project ideas.

Step 5 June

Common FWP and partner projects will be "bundled" to coordinate matching funds and effectively leverage resources. These bundles will be provided for review and approval to the Comprehensive Conservation Steering Committee, a team of FWP administrators who provide policy-level oversight of the CFWCS and Action Plan development and the use, allocation, and FWP match of SWG funds.

Step 6 July–October

FWP and its partners on the Action Plan will further develop project plans in preparation for launch in 2007.



DAVE HAGENRUBER

Step 7 Spring 2007

Begin implementing the Action Plan, including the start up of new conservation projects.

Step 8 Spring 2008

Develop project progress reports and adjust the Action Plan as necessary.

Please keep an eye on your mailbox, e-mail, and newspaper. We will be sending out more information on public meetings to discuss the Comprehensive Conservation Action Plan and associated conservation priorities.

For More Information

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